DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 501 CE 073 737

TITLE	International Comparisons of Adult Literacy. Indicator of the Month.
INSTITUTION	National Center for Education Statistics (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NCES-97-919
PUB DATE	Apr 97
NOTE	3p.; Extracted from "The Condition of Education, 1996."
PUB TYPE	Statistical Data (110)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; *Comparative Analysis; *Developed Nations; Educational Research; Foreign Countries; Literacy Education; World Problems
IDENTIFIERS	Canada; Germany; Netherlands; Poland; Sweden; Switzerland; United States

ABSTRACT

Compared to most countries assessed in 1994, the United States had a greater concentration of adults who scored at the lowest literacy levels across prose, document, and quantitative literacy domains. However, it had one of the higher concentrations of adults who scored at or above level 4 on the prose scale. The proportion of adults who scored at each literacy level was similar across the three scales in Canada and the United States. In Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, the proportion of adults who scored at the highest literacy level (level 4/5) was greater on the quantitative than on the prose scale. The distribution of literacy proficiency across different age groups was fairly uniform in the United States, whereas in several other countries young adults had higher literacy levels than older adults. Within Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, and the Netherlands, the younger group (aged 26-35) was almost twice as likely to score at or above level 4 on the prose scale as the older group (aged 46-55). Within particular occupations, the proportion of workers scoring at each literacy level varied across the assessed countries. The proportion of skilled craft workers scoring at level 3 or above was lower in the United States than in other countries, particularly Germany. (A table and three graphs show percentage distribution of the population scoring at each of the five literacy levels, by literacy scale, for Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland--French and German, and the United States.) (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

INDICATOR OF THE MONTH

April 1997

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

SCOPE OF INTEREST NOTICE

The ERIC Facility has assigned this document for processing to: CE

In our judgment, this document is also of interest to the Clearinghouses noted to the right. Indexing should reflect their special points of view. SO

ED 405 501

International comparisons of adult literacy

In recent years, literacy has been viewed as one of the fundamental tools necessary for successful economic performance in industrialized societies. Literacy is no longer defined merely as a basic threshold of reading ability, but rather as the ability to understand and use printed information in daily activities, at home, at work, and in the community. As society becomes more complex and low skill jobs continue to disappear, concern about adults' ability to use written information to function in society continues to increase. Within countries, literacy levels are affected by both the quality and quantity of the population's formal education, as well as their participation in informal learning activities.

- **Compared to most of the other countries assessed in 1994, the United States had a greater concentration of adults who scored at the lowest literacy levels across the prose, document, and quantitative literacy domains. However, the United States had one of the higher concentrations of adults who scored at or above level 4 on the prose scale.**
- **In 1994, the proportion of adults who scored at each literacy level was similar across the three scales in Canada and the United States. In Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, on the other hand, the proportion of adults who scored at the highest literacy level (level 4/5) was greater on the quantitative scale than on the prose scale.**
- **The distribution of literacy proficiency across different age groups was fairly uniform in the United States, with the exception of the oldest age group, while in several other countries young adults had higher literacy levels than older adults. For example, the percentage of U.S. adults aged 26–35 who scored at or above level 4 on the prose scale was similar to the percentage of U.S. adults aged 46–55 scoring at that level (22 and 24 percent, respectively). Within Germany, the younger group was almost twice as likely to score at or above level 4 on the prose scale as the older group (20 and 11 percent, respectively). Differences by age in Switzerland, Sweden, and the Netherlands were similar to those in Germany.**
- **Within particular occupations, the proportion of workers scoring at each literacy level varied across the assessed countries. For example, the proportion of skilled craft workers scoring at level 3 or above was lower in the United States than in other countries, particularly Germany.**

Percentage distribution of the population in selected countries scoring at each of the five literacy levels, by literacy scale: 1994

	Prose scale				Document scale				Quantitative scale			
Country	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5
Canada	16.6	25.6	35.1	22.7	18.2	24.7	32.1	25.1	16.9	26.1	34.8	22.2
Germany	14.4	34.2	38.0	13.4	9.0	32.7	39.5	18.9	6.7	26.6	43.2	23.5
Netherlands	10.5	30.1	44.1	15.3	10.1	25.7	44.2	20.0	10.3	25.5	44.3	19.9
Poland	42.6	34.5	19.8	3.1	45.4	30.7	18.0	5.8	39.1	30.1	23.9	6.8
Sweden	7.5	20.3	39.7	32.4	6.2	18.9	39.4	35.5	6.6	18.6	39.0	35.8
Switzerland (French)	17.6	33.7	38.6	10.0	16.2	28.8	38.9	16.0	12.9	24.5	42.2	20.4
Switzerland (German)	19.3	35.7	36.1	8.9	18.1	29.1	36.6	16.1	14.2	26.2	40.7	19.0
United States	20.7	25.9	32.4	21.1	23.7	25.9	31.4	19.0	21.0	25.3	31.3	22.5

Table reads: In 1994, 21.1 percent of the population in the United States scored at or above level 4 on the prose literacy scale.

NOTE: The individuals who performed at level 1 demonstrated the lowest literacy proficiency, while those at level 5 displayed the highest literacy proficiency.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and Statistics Canada, *Literacy, Economy and Society. Results of the International Adult Literacy Survey*, 1995.

CE 073737

U.S. Department of Education

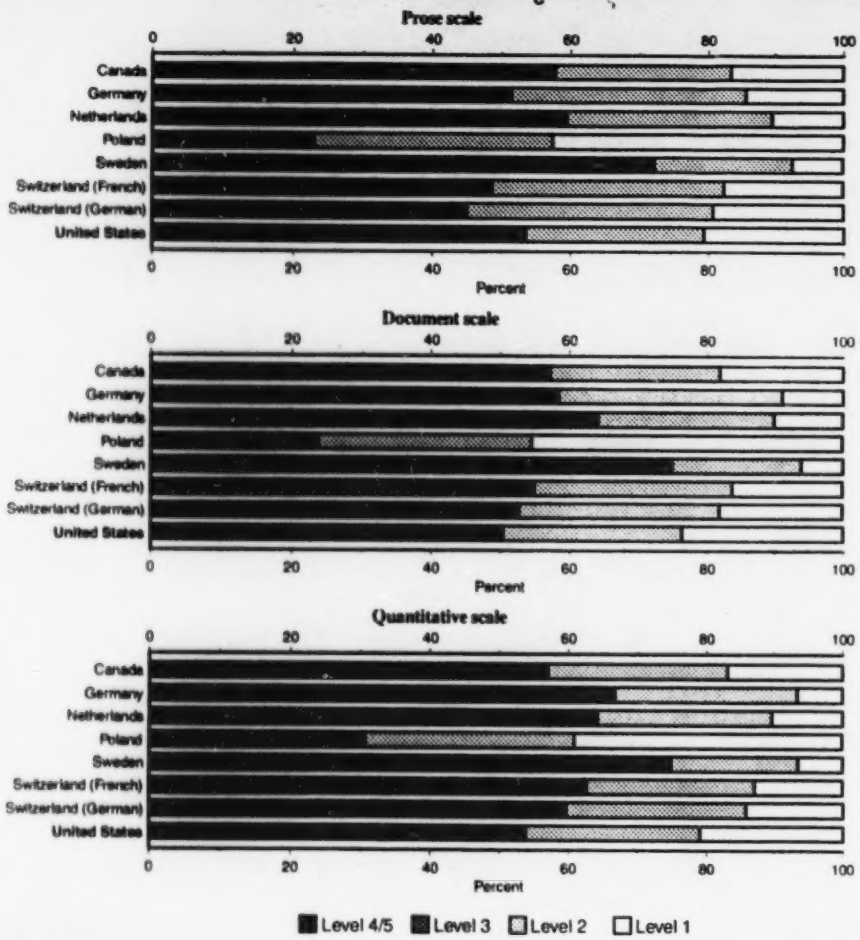
Office of Educational Research and Improvement

NCES 97-919

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Percentage distribution of the population in selected countries scoring at each of the five literacy levels, by literacy scale: 1994



SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and Statistics Canada, *Literacy, Economy and Society, Results of the International Adult Literacy Survey*, 1995.

This indicator is one of 60 from *The Condition of Education 1996*. It is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission. Suggested citation: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *The Condition of Education 1996*, NCES 96-304, by Thomas M. Smith (ed.). D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996.

To obtain a copy of the full volume of *The Condition of Education*, contact the National Data Resource Center on (703) 845-3151 (E-mail: ndrc@pcci.com or ndrc@inet.ed.gov). This title is also available on the Internet at http://www.ed.gov/NCES/pubs/ce/.

United States
Department of Education
Washington, DC 20208–5650

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use, $300

Postage and Fees Paid
U.S. Department of Education
Permit No. G–17

FIRST CLASS

MS-5725 NCES 97-919 (57035)
Ted Brandhorst
Director
ERIC Facility
1100 West Street, Second Floor
Laurel MD 20707-3598

BEST COPY AVAILABLE